DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 354 216 SP 034 293

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TITLE Peer Coaching within the Internship. Monograph No. 10.
INSTITUTION Saskatchewan Univ., Saskatoon. Coll. of Education.
PUB DATE May 92
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperating Teachers; *Demonstration Programs; Elementary Secondary Education; Faculty Development; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Internship Programs; Peer Evaluation; *Peer Relationship; Practicums; Preservice Teacher Education; Role Perception; *Student Teachers; Student Teacher Supervisors; *Teacher Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS Canada; *Peer Coaching; Saskatchewan

ABSTRACT

This monograph describes a peer coaching project in Saskatchewan (Canada) implemented in two consecutive terms of a 16-week extended practicum. The purpose was twofold: (1) to experiment with having intern pairs engage in the supervision cycle in conjunction with the supervision provided by the cooperating teacher; and (2) to monitor the effectiveness of the process in terms of mutual support as well as professional growth and development for the interns. The premise was that the process could: provide a form of peer support for the interns, increase teaching effectiveness, give interns experience in peer coaching, and reduce observation and coaching required of the cooperating teacher. Selection of interns, procedures, roles of respective participants, including cooperating teacher and college supervisor, suggested format and assessment of the project are described. Findings indicate that interns found that the process provided both additional support and feedback, thereby increasing teaching effectiveness; cooperating teachers responded positively to the benefits inherent in the process. However, factors such as workload, scheduling, and number of observations must be adjusted to make the process a more significant experience. (Author/LL)

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S163/293

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Abstract

A Peer Coaching Project was designed to experiment with having intern pairs engage in peer supervision, in addition to the supervision provided by cooperating teachers. The process was monitored and evaluated to determine effectiveness in terms of mutual support and professional growth and development. The selection of interns, procedures, roles of the respective participants (including cooperating teacher and college supervisor), and suggested format, are described. The findings and conclusions indicate that the interns and cooperating teachers responded positively to the benefits inherent in the process. However, factors such as workload, scheduling, and number of observations must be adjusted to make the process a more significant experience.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

Barbara Pavelich is a College Supervisor and an assistant to the Coordinators of the Center for School-Based Programs, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. A former teacher and counsellor, Barbara has had extensive experience in the supervision of interns in the sixteen week extended practicum. She assists in program development, student placements, and research.

PEER COACHING WITHIN THE INTERNSHIP

INTRODUCTION

A pilot Peer Coaching Project was implemented in two consecutive terms of the 16 week Extended Practicum. The purpose was twofold:

1. To experiment with having intern pairs engage in the supervision cycle in conjunction with the supervision provided by the cooperating teacher.

2. To monitor the effectiveness of the process in terms of mutual support as well as growth and development for the interns.

The premise was that the process could:

1. Provide a form of "peer" support for the interns.

2. Increase teaching effectiveness.

3. Give interns experience in peer coaching which they could then use with future colleagues in the school system.

4. Reduce the amount of observation and coaching required on the part of the cooperating teacher.

INITIATION OF THE PROJECT

In the first term the project was conducted informally to determine a process which might be workable. Therefore, in this term there was no pre-identification of the pairs. Rather the College Supervisor selected the pairs about one month into the internship. The selection was done after observing the students and on the basis of personal compatibility, similar grade levels/subject areas, and interest on the part of the interns and cooperating teachers.

Two pairs were selected in one high school and one elementary school. At the high school the interns had similar majors and minors, were "strong" beginning

teachers, and were confident and enthusiastic about the project. Their cooperating teachers were similarly enthusiastic.

At the elementary level both interns were teaching middle years. One was strong and confident and had a good relationship with the cooperating teacher. The other intern was quite insecure and concerned about his teaching. He had a cooperating teacher who was quite reluctant to give daily feedback and this added to an existing high stress level. Part of the decision to try peer coaching resulted from the hope that the process might provide the support and feedback this intern was not getting from the teacher. Both teachers seemed open to the concept initially but the one teacher remained relatively uninvolved.

In the subsequent term the project was conducted in a more structured format. The selection was done by determining in advance which interns would be interested in participating in the project. Interns indicated this when they registered for their Extended Practicum and also indicated a choice of peer (if they knew someone in the same grade/subject area who was also interested). There was some effort made to place these students at the same school. However, placement procedures did not always permit this. Following the placements, the College Supervisor selected two pairs who had indicated an interest in the project, one in each of an elementary and high school. The elementary pair had requested to be placed together. The high school pair had requested participation in the project but did not know each other prior to the internship.

The selected interns and the cooperating teachers were approached at the first inservice. A brief explanation was given and interns were asked if they were still interested in participating. Cooperating teachers were asked to participate and principals were consulted for approval after the College Supervisor felt assured that the intern and teachers were comfortable with the process.

In both terms, and regardless of the selection process, the decision had already

been made not to initiate the peer coaching process until the first month had elapsed. This was in order to:

1. enable interns to establish a relationship with the cooperating teacher.
2. allow interns to become familiar with the process of the supervision cycle.
3. allow intern pairs to get to know each other on a more personal level.
4. establish if there were any problems which might be detrimental to the process, such as one of the interns experiencing personal problems or other difficulty in the internship.

Prior to beginning the project, the College Supervisor met with the teachers and interns to review the process and guidelines.

In addition, the interns in the second term wrote a personality assessment test. The intent was to assist the interns in analyzing their personal strengths/weaknesses. Secondly, it was hoped that they could provide feedback later on how various personality traits might impact on progress in the internship.

PROCEDURES

At the commencement of the project, interns and teachers were given the following information regarding the role of the participants and a suggested format.

A. Role of Participants

Role of Peer Pairs

- develop self supervision skills by alternating as teacher and observer.
- develop observation skills directly or indirectly (audio/video).
- help develop improvement plan.
- write summary of observation in peer-supervision log book.

Role of Cooperating Teacher

- at midterm, assist in a formative evaluative plan for the second half of

the internship.
- monitor feedback skills and supervision process.
- ensure that the lesson content is consistent with curriculum, needs of students, and program continuity.
- assess the congruence between intent and performance of pairs.
- assist in supervision and ongoing developmental plan with a view to intern growth and accurate final evaluation.
- record a weekly summary of effectiveness of process, problems, and recommended changes for the future.

Role of College Supervisor

- act as a resource person to peers and cooperating teacher.
- oversee and note feedback techniques.
- practice developmental supervision with each peer pair.
- assess the congruence between intent and performance of pairs.
- respond to peer needs in supervision.
- review and provide feedback on the observation summaries placed in the peer supervision log book.

B. Suggested Format for the Peer Coaching Project

1. If possible peers observe each other at least twice per week. The formal observation may be as brief as 15 - 20 minutes or may consist of video tapes or audio tapes which can be viewed/listened to later and discussed.

2. It is important that the amount of total feedback not be too radically reduced and that the cooperating teacher continues to monitor the growth and development of his/her respective interns. Both the cooperating teacher and the College supervisor are additional resources in this regard.

3. To effect the above, the following is a suggested format for one week.

Monday

Intern A Teaches — Targets are selected from those established as most relevant from previous data/conferences with cooperating teacher/college supervisor.

Intern B Observes

If a second formal lesson is being taught that day, the cooperating teacher takes data on the same targets. The peers could then use both data collection instruments in the post-conference, and establish future

targets.

Tuesday

The same cycle is repeated with teacher/observer roles reversed.

Wednesday

Intern A teaches and Intern B observes, but this time the cooperating teacher sits in on the "observed lesson", and also sits in on the pre and post conferences to monitor the effectiveness of the conferencing and analysis of data.

Thursday

As for Wednesday with teacher/observer roles reversed.

Friday

No peer coaching. However, the teacher takes data and conducts conferences to assist in feedback and establishing targets for the next week.

It was strongly reinforced that these were guidelines only and pairs were encouraged to modify according to their own particular situation. The participants were given additional data collection instruments (beyond those found in the Internship Manual). In addition, a strong emphasis was placed on the interns maintaining a log book. The book was to contain all peer supervised lessons, data collection sheets and the intern's reflections on the process and insights gained.

Whenever possible, the College Supervisor attempted to be present early in the process to sit in on a peer supervision cycle. The intent was to monitor the peers' understanding of how to conduct an effective supervision cycle. In the instances where the College Supervisor was unable to coincide a visit with the peer supervision cycle, the data, conclusions, future targets, and reflections in the log back were reviewed by the Supervisor. In addition, the Supervisor discussed progress at each visit to the school.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT

At the conclusion of the project interns and teachers were asked to respond in

writing to a series of evaluative questions.

Intern's Evaluative Questions

1. What insights (or feedback) did you receive from your 'peer' that you did not receive from your cooperating teacher?

2. Describe ways in which your peer helped you in your planning/organizing.

3. Describe ways your peer helped you in a supportive manner.

4. Would you recommend the peer coaching process for other interns? Why or why not?

5. Describe ways that you feel the process should be adjusted to make it more effective for future use.

6. Did you find the personality test to be of value? Why or why not? Comment on insights you gained as the internship progressed regarding information on the test results in relationship to teaching, self-improvement, peer coaching.

Cooperating Teacher's Evaluative Questions

1. Comment on the effectiveness of the feedback skills/supervision process by the peer pairs.

2. Comment on the congruence between the intent and performance of the pairs. This would include the ability of the pairs to determine appropriate targets and then arrive at conclusions which promoted 'growth' or evolved into targets for future lessons.

3. Describe the benefits (if any) of the peer coaching process for the cooperating teacher.

4. Describe the disadvantages (if any) of the peer coaching process for the cooperating teacher.

5. Describe ways in which you feel the process helped or hindered your intern.

6. Would you want to participate in a peer coaching project in the future. Why or why not?

7. Summarize the effectiveness of the process, problems encountered and how the process could be adjusted to make it more effective.

The responses to the evaluative questions and informal feedback were used

to assess the effectiveness of the project and make recommendations regarding the following six areas:

1. The selection process for interns who participated in the project.
2. The process used for involving cooperating teachers and principals.
3. The interns' perceptions on the effectiveness and advantages of the process.
4. The cooperating teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness and advantages of the process.
5. The changes that should be made to make the process more effective in the future.
6. The usefulness of the personality assessment.

FINDINGS

The findings were as follows:

1. The selection process for the intern participants was reasonably successful. As already indicated, in term 1 this was done informally after assessing intern compatibility and willingness to participate. In one case, the choice was also based on a need for greater feedback for one intern. The process did prove to be valuable to the interns; however, the process broke down after a few observations due to scheduling problems. Another unspoken factor may have been the "inflexibility" of the one intern who was not receiving adequate feedback from his teacher. The second pair at the high school level were a Physical Education/Social Studies combination. They were very positive, compatible and able to work the observations into their schedules.

   In the second term intern participants volunteered for the project. One pair knew each other and were placed at the same school. The other pair did not know each other prior to the internship. In both cases, the interns were compatible. However, the interns did indicate that when they were asked during registration meetings if they wished to participate, they had not really

understood the process. For example, one pair thought they would merely get together for planning sessions, whereas the intent was that they would engage in a complete peer coaching process.

2. The process of involving cooperating teachers and principals presented some problems. Three out of four principals enthusiastically gave the project their blessing and did not get involved or interfere in any way thereafter. However, one of the four took exception to the fact that only two of the three interns in the school would be involved in the project. He felt it should be all three or none, even though it was not a major factor with the third intern. An attempt was made to try to accommodate his wishes but it seemed impossible to operate a triad effectively. He eventually withdrew from his position, but this did cause some problems and delay the process for a few weeks.

There were eight cooperating teachers involved. Five did a superb job in cooperating, facilitating, supporting, observing and evaluating the process. Of the remaining three, two were supportive in theory but really did not become involved in co-observing or monitoring the process. (One of these was the teacher who was reluctant to give his intern feedback.) The third teacher offered passive resistance. While she did not verbalize her objections, she simply opted out of being involved, observing/or providing any feedback to the interns. She similarly did not submit any written feedback on the process. Her position caused some frustration on the part of both interns and the other cooperating teacher in the configuration.

It had been recognized prior to the project that it was preferable to have a firm commitment from cooperating teachers prior to intern selection for the project. However, time and placement procedures did not permit this.

3. The effectiveness and advantages of the process as determined by the interns was generally positive. All interns reported that the process offered support primarily because the peer was in the "same situation", "could relate directly to my concerns", and "could offer suggestions of ideas she had experimented with". Another said that the peer "related to me as a peer and a friend and was there when I was stressed or triumphant." One intern said that her peer provided more positive feedback while the cooperating teacher was more critical. There was only one concern raised about the process. One intern felt that it could possibly lead to "competitiveness" on the part of intern pairs who were applying for the same jobs. At the same time she said that the process afforded "double the helpful hints and double the reinforcement."

   One intern noted that having both the peer and cooperating teachers in the room was distracting to the students and perhaps wasn't necessary because the data was similar. She also said that written comments were most beneficial because she could look through them later and this alleviated the problem of finding enough time for postconferences with the peer.

4. The effectiveness and advantages of the process as reported by the cooperating teachers was varied. Those teachers who provided feedback felt that the process was beneficial to interns. All felt that the interns received support and additional feedback from someone with a similar perspective. One felt that it also helped her in providing another opinion and gave her more time to communicate with parents and do other time-worthy things. One teacher did not see any particular benefit accruing to her. Another felt that the process presented a problem on one occasion where both cooperating teacher and peer sat in on a lesson. He felt that there was a difference in their recording and interpretation of the data and so conflict arose.

5. The recommended changes for the future were: a) contact should be made

with the cooperating teachers earlier; b) all teachers and interns must volunteer, be committed, and have a clear understanding of the expectations; c) the process should be adjusted to make it less time consuming and to alleviate extra pressure on the interns; d) there should be adjustments to make it easier to schedule observations within the interns' respective time commitments and teaching loads. It was suggested that the scheduling and pressure problems might be alleviated by starting the process right at the beginning of the term and reducing involvement as the intern moved into full time teaching. Scheduling simply became too difficult as the work load increased. Another suggested alternative was to alter the expectations so that interns were only teaching half or three-quarter time rather than full time.

6. Comments regarding the usefulness of the personality assessment were generally positive although it was only administered to the four students in the second term. Three of the four thought the test was fairly accurate and one thought it was very accurate. Two of the interns indicated that they could see how certain traits contribute to the effectiveness of a teacher and one of the two added that "it was beneficial in helping me realize why I do things the way I do." Two of the interns also indicated that they thought the test would be useful within the College for various reasons: a) to assist in selection b) to place students who had similar scores together or c) within the internship in a pre-practicum course to help students consider the traits necessary for teaching.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In general, the interns found that the process provided both additional and valuable support and feedback. It also appeared that the interns were able to use the feedback to increase teacher effectiveness. All of the interns felt that

they would recommend the process to others but that there should be modifications.

2. Greater advance preparation is necessary to obtain the proper commitment from interns, cooperating teachers and principals. Interns and teachers must clearly understand the process, the benefits, commitment and extra involvement that may be required. All parties should be contacted well in advance of the commencement of such a project.

3. The greatest concern was with the increased workload and the difficulty in scheduling observations during the second half of the internship. Before the project was initiated, these areas were anticipated as possible sources of problems. As already noted, the process had been deliberately deferred until the second month of internship in order to assure compatibility and minimize potential problems.

   Some feedback suggested that the process should begin right at the beginning of the internship. If this were done, it seems that some additional measures might be necessary to determine intern compatibility. These might include matching interns according to similar academic averages and personality traits as well as similar grade levels, subject areas and interest in the project. It may also require a clear understanding that the process may have to be interrupted or terminated, if this seemed advisable.

4. Two of the suggestions made by interns and teachers require careful reflection as these suggestions could present further complications. The suggestions were that the expectations regarding intern full-time teaching should be modified, or alternatively, that the process should terminate when full time teaching begins. Reducing the full time teaching expectation would create a precedent or "different" expectation for those involved in peer coaching. This would no doubt cause dissatisfaction with other interns. In addition,

one must carefully consider the benefits which accrue to the intern from experiencing full time teaching. Secondly, to terminate the process at the commencement of full time teaching is to terminate at the point when the process might be most helpful in developing teaching skills. Implications of either of the above would have to be weighed carefully.

5. A definite recommended change is that the guidelines regarding the number of observations should be modified. If the major purpose is peer support, one observation per intern per week may be a realistic maximum number. This would provide the support system, make the process less onerous, and still assure adequate monitoring by the cooperating teacher on the other days. This change would also reduce some of the scheduling problems.

6. More thought should be put into how to make the process more attractive to teachers. One observation per week, as suggested above, with the understanding that the cooperating teacher need not be present might be beneficial.

7. Peer coaching appears to be beneficial within the internship. However, it is difficult to implement within the current structure of the program. Perhaps its use in the future is best suited to selective situations. Examples might be particular interns who seem to be in need of additional support, or situations where for whatever reason, the cooperating teacher is unable to give the desired amount of feedback, support and supervision. However, one must be certain in each selective situation that both interns and cooperative teachers are willing participants and that there will be benefits accruing to both interns.

8. A follow-up project incorporating some of the suggested recommendations would be advisable to further determine the benefits and practicality of peer coaching within the internship.